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ABSTRACT

Recent proposals by President Clinton to increase the availability and affordability of child care address a major issue of concern for many parents. This Harris Poll on child care surveyed 1,000 adults between January 14 and 18, 1998. The findings indicate that: (1) about half of all adults were aware of the president's recent proposal; (2) most of the adults who had heard of the proposal supported it; (3) a quarter of all adults said that they or their partners had used or needed child care in the last 5 years, with half of these parents saying that it was extremely or very difficult to find affordable care, and 44 percent said that it was extremely or very difficult to find high quality care; (4) about half of adults who had sought child care in the last 5 years said that the lack of acceptable child care reduced their ability to do their job as well as they wanted, and 43 percent indicated that the lack of acceptable care prevented them from taking a job; (5) over 80 percent of adults responded positively to a proposal to give tax breaks to employers who offer flexible working hours or encourage telecommuting; and (6) 60 percent believe that it is primarily the families' responsibility to find child care, while 15 percent believe it is the government's responsibility and 23 percent, the employers' responsibility. (Eight tables list questions asked and detail findings.) (KB)

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The Harris Poll

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THE HARRIS POLL #5
Wednesday, January 28, 1998

HARRIS POLL ON CHILD CARE

- ***Most people who have heard about president's proposal support it.***
- ***Large numbers say it has been very difficult to find high quality affordable care.***
- ***Large numbers report lack of acceptable child care prevented them from taking a job they wanted, and reduced their ability to do a job well.***

by Humphrey Taylor

President Clinton's proposals to make child care more available and affordable clearly address a major issue of concern to very large numbers of parents. A quarter of all adults say they or their spouses or partners have used or needed child care in the last five years. Half (51%) of these parents say it has been extremely or very difficult to find affordable care, and almost as many (44%) say it was extremely or very difficult to find high quality care. Furthermore, half of these people say the lack of acceptable child care reduced their, or their spouse's or partner's, ability to do their job as well as they wanted to do it. And 43% say the lack of acceptable care prevented them from taking a job they wanted.

These are some of the results of a Harris Poll of 1,000 adults surveyed between January 14 and 18, 1998.

The survey also showed that only about half (51%) of all adults are aware of the president's recent proposals, but that by 67%-24%, most of these people support the proposal.

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A much larger majority (87%-11%) also responded positively to a proposal to give tax breaks to employers who offer flexible working hours or encourage telecommuting for working parents

Overall, the survey results leave no doubt that the president is addressing an issue of great importance to large numbers of working families and parents Fully 89% of all adults believe that it is difficult for "most American families today to find affordable high quality child care," and 57% believe it is extremely or very difficult

However, most people (60%) believe that it is primarily the families' responsibility to find child care, far more than those who believe it is primarily the government's (15%) or the employers' (23%) responsibility

The survey findings show that the president has identified an issue for which it will be easy for him to attract strong support -- and one that Republicans who oppose him will run the risk of alienating substantial numbers of voters As one would expect from this president, it is a shrewd political move

Humphrey Taylor is the Chairman and CEO of Louis Harris and Associates, Inc

TABLE 1

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT PERCEIVED TO BE TO FIND AFFORDABLE, QUALITY CARE?

Base All Adults

"Overall, how difficult do you think it is for most American families today to find affordable, high quality child care -- extremely difficult, very difficult, somewhat difficult, not very difficult or not difficult at all?"

	Total %
Extremely difficult	25
Very difficult	32
Somewhat difficult	32
Not very difficult	6
Not difficult at all	3
Don't know/Refused	2

TABLE 2

HAVE YOU/SPOUSE/PARTNER USED OR NEEDED CHILD CARE IN LAST 5 YEARS?

Base All Adults

"Have you or your spouse or partner used or needed child care services in the past five years, or not?"

	Total %
Have used or needed	24
Have not	76

TABLE 3

HOW DIFFICULT WAS IT TO FIND HIGH QUALITY/AFFORDABLE CARE?

Base Have used or needed child care in last 5 years

"Overall, how difficult has it been for you to get (READ EACH ITEM) child care -- extremely difficult, very difficult, somewhat difficult, not too difficult or not difficult at all?"

	Extremely Difficult %	Very Difficult %	Somewhat Difficult %	Not Too Difficult %	Not Difficult At All %
High quality	23	21	30	11	14
Affordable	26	25	20	16	12

TABLE 4

HAS LACK OF ACCEPTABLE CARE PREVENTED ACCEPTANCE OF JOB OR REDUCED QUALITY OF WORK DONE?

Base Have used or needed child care in last 5 years

"In the past five years, has the absence of acceptable child care (READ EACH ITEM), or not?"

	Has %	Has Not %	Don't Know %
Prevented you, or your partner or spouse, from taking a job, or the kind of job you, or they, wanted	43	57	-
Reduced your, or your partner's or spouse's, ability to do a job as well as you, or they, wanted to do it	52	47	1

TABLE 5

WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING ACCESS TO CARE?

Base All Adults

"Who do you think should be **primarily** responsible for ensuring that families have access to child care -- government, employers or individual families?"

	Total %
Government	15
Employers	23
Families	60
Don't know	1

TABLE 6

AWARENESS OF PRESIDENT'S PROPOSALS

Base All Adults

"Are you aware of President Clinton's new proposal to make child care more available and affordable, or not?"

	Total %
Aware	51
Not aware	48
Don't know	*

TABLE 7

FAVOR OR OPPOSE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL

Base Aware of president's proposal

"From what you have heard, do you favor or oppose President Clinton's proposal?"

	Total %
Favor	67
Oppose	24
Don't know	9

TABLE 8

FAVOR OR OPPOSE PROPOSAL FOR TAX BREAKS FOR FLEXIBLE HOURS AND TELECOMMUTING

Base All Adults

"One way to help parents of young children would be to give tax concessions to businesses that offer flexible working hours and/or encourage telecommuting for working parents Would you favor or oppose this suggestion?"

	Total %
Favor	87
Oppose	11
Don't know	2

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted by telephone within the United States between January 14 to 18, among a nationwide cross section of 1,000 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

In theory, with a sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is difficult or impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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